CHAPTER 2
SELECTION

How do we choose to take from our past certain things to remember? How do we decide which of life's many stories we wish to tell? It is a mysterious process, and one that occurs daily in museums, archives, and libraries.

The documents, photographs, and objects that are the evidence for our stories, often come to their acid-free, carefully-controlled environments willy-nilly, by happenstance as much as by planning. They have been absent-mindedly or quite determinedly winnowed by their creators, his or her family, and by the erstwhile field mouse. They have been evaluated by graduate students, yard-sale goers, file clerks, and scholars, as well as by the keepers of family heirlooms.

For most institutions, the creation of online collections will mean one more series of choices, one more set of evaluations, one more group of interpreters. Can these individuals move beyond subjective processes when making decisions about what to select for digitization? Probably not. However, they can ask certain questions that will more objectively guide their selection process. This chapter will discuss the issues of selection and help you define your selection criteria.

Once the initial planning phase has been completed, it is time to select materials for digitization. The analysis of collection materials done during the project planning phase should provide a strong foundation for determining your selection criteria. These selection criteria apply to both the preliminary selection of collections and then the more detailed selection of material within collections, including both the physical and intellectual aspects of selection that need to be considered. Each category covers both the macro and micro selection processes.

Determining your Selection Criteria

How does one choose the best materials to digitize? Acknowledging that content selection is most often driven by subjective responses, the following provides some framework to help you make those selection decisions more objectively. Below are the central elements to be considered in selection with some questions to help you assess material. These central elements focus on seven areas that form the framework for your selection criteria: audience, impact on your institution, intellectual control, intellectual property rights, preservation, and technical considerations. Each section provides guidance and questions that should help you to think through defining your selection criteria.